

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6211
PAUL FRANCUCH/PHILADELPHIA

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CAMPAIGN '78: A POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN PHILADELPHIA

ANNCR:

VOTERS IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA WILL BE ASKED ON ELECTION DAY, NOVEMBER SEVENTH, IF THEY WANT TO MAKE A CHANGE IN THEIR CITY CHARTER -- THE DOCUMENT WHICH OUTLINES THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CITY GOVERNMENT. FOR SOME SPECIAL REASONS ROOTED IN THE LOCAL POLITICAL SITUATION, IT'S A QUESTION WHICH HAS CAUSED HEATED DEBATE. PAUL FRANCUCH EXPLAINS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

PHILADELPHIA IS A VERY SPECIAL CITY IN THE UNITED STATES. THE NATION'S TWO MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS -- THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION -- WERE WRITTEN IN THIS CITY FOLLOWING CONSIDERABLE DEBATE. TODAY, TWO CENTURIES LATER, PHILADELPHIA IS THE SITE OF ANOTHER IMPORTANT, ALTHOUGH LESS MONUMENTAL, DOCUMENT DEBATE. THE ISSUE FOCUSES ON A PROVISION IN THE CITY CHARTER WHICH LIMITS A MAYOR TO ONLY TWO TERMS IN OFFICE. VOTERS WILL BE ASKED TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT A CITY MAYOR SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO SERVE MORE THAN TWO SUCCESSIVE TERMS.

THE REFERENDUM QUESTION IS NOT CONTROVERSIAL. WHAT IS STIRRING EMOTIONS IS THE QUESTION OF WHETHER PHILADELPHIA'S CURRENT MAYOR, FRANK RIZZO, SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO SERVE ANOTHER TERM IN OFFICE. THROUGHOUT THIS PAST YEAR, MISTER RIZZO HAS BEEN SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF WHITE PEOPLE, WHOM HE FELT WERE THE VICTIMS OF REVERSE DISCRIMINATION. THE MOVE SOLIDIFIED HIS SUPPORT AMONG MAINLY WORKING-CLASS WHITES, BUT INFURIATED MOST BLACKS AND WHITE LIBERALS.

LAST MONTH, MAYOR RIZZO ANNOUNCED HIS SUPPORT FOR THE CITY CHARTER AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD ALLOW HIM TO RUN FOR OFFICE AGAIN. HIS SECOND TERM EXPIRES NEXT YEAR. THE ANNOUNCEMENT CAUSED THE EMOTIONAL PITCH OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PEAK. TODAY, THE POLITICAL TALK IN PHILADELPHIA IS NOT OVER THE UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS. THE CHARTER AMENDMENT HAS CAPTURED ALMOST ALL OF THE ATTENTION. MISTER RIZZO'S OPPONENTS CHARGE HE IS RUNNING A RACIST CAMPAIGN, BUT HIS SUPPORTERS DENY THIS, SAYING THE MAYOR IS THE VICTIM OF DISTORTED NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE. RECENT POLLS SHOW NEARLY SIXTY PERCENT OF PHILADELPHIA'S VOTERS ARE OPPOSED TO THE AMENDMENT. ONLY ABOUT THIRTY PERCENT SUPPORT IT. THE NEXT TWO WEEKS OF CAMPAIGNING WILL HELP MANY IN THIS LARGE EASTERN CITY DETERMINE WHICH WAY TO VOTE: AND, IN EFFECT, DETERMINE THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF THEIR, MAYOR FRANK RIZZO.

WJL/RCS